

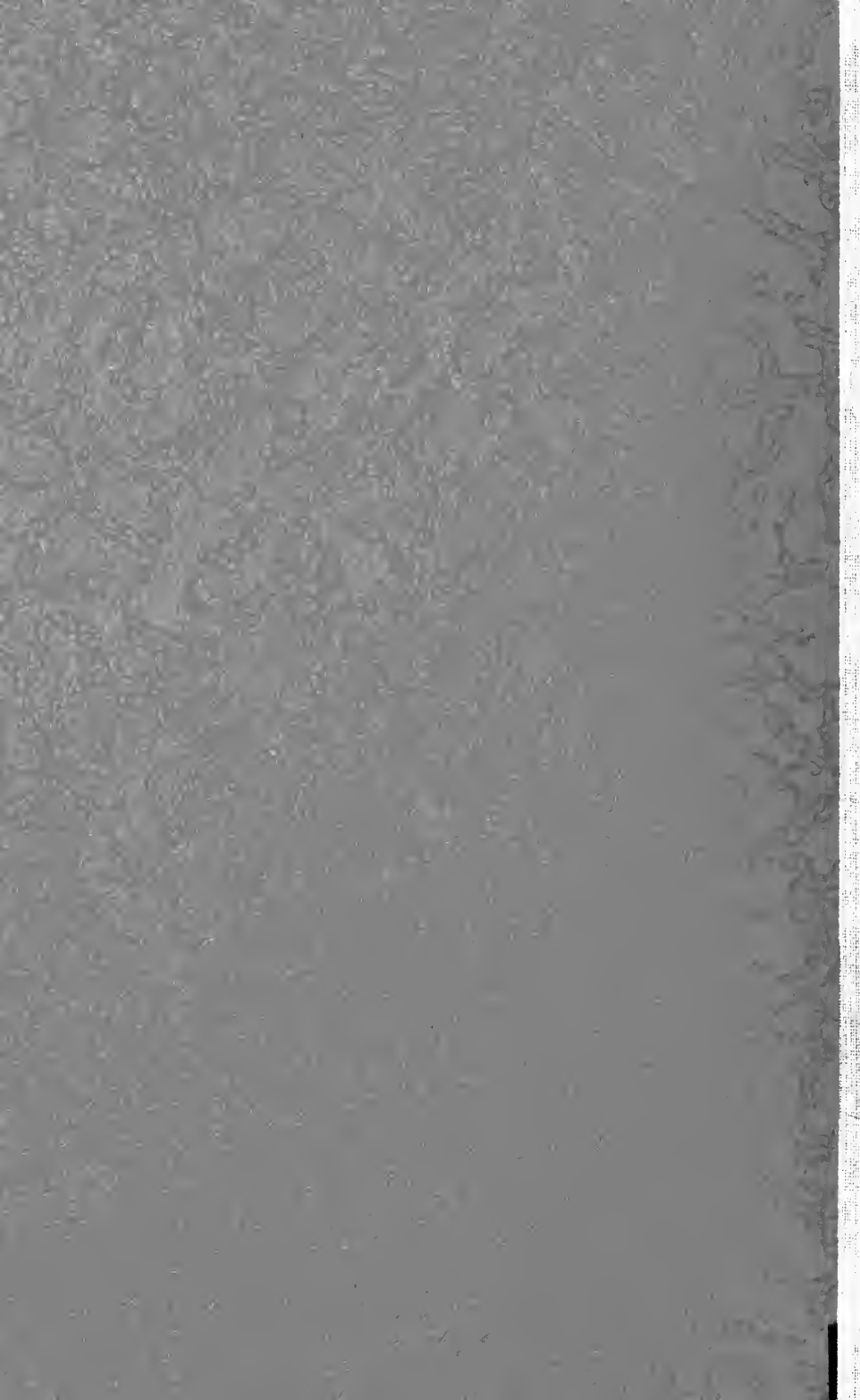
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JEWISH CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVILIZATION

BY D. G. LYON, OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY

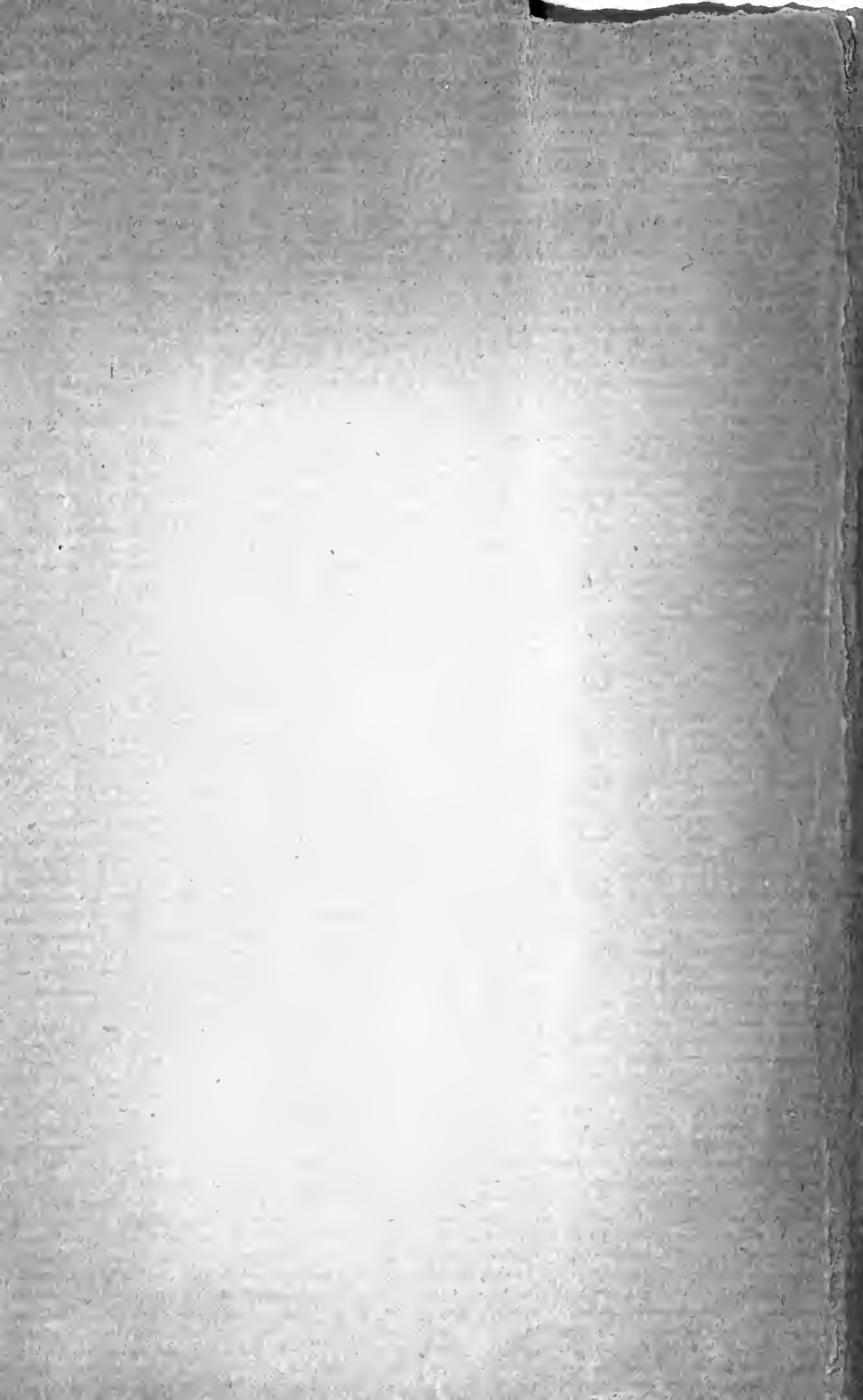
AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN CHICAGO BEFORE THE

WORLD'S PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

ON SEPTEMBER 18, 1893

BOSTON, 1893



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BY D. G. LYON.

[This address is the outgrowth of the author's studies in connection with a course of instruction on the "History of Israel," which he gives annually to the students of Harvard University. Under the title "Columbus and the Jew," it was first delivered at the "Temple of the Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David," Providence, R. I., as a part of the Columbian Celebration of that Society, on October 21, 1892. It was afterwards read before the Ministers' Club, of which the writer is a member; before a group of the members of the Elysium Club, Boston; and in its present somewhat modified form, before the first World's Parliament of Religions, Columbus Hall, Chicago, Sept. 18, 1893. This explanation may make clearer certain of the forms of expression employed. The address has appeared in full in the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, of Sept. 19, 1893, and in Vol. II. of the "World's Parliament of Religions," edited by Rev. Dr. J. H. Barrows, Chicago, 1893. In sending it out again, the writer hopes that it may aid in hastening the era of brotherly love so beautifully foretold by the ancient Hebrew prophet.]

In this glad Columbian year, when all the world is rejoicing with us, and in this hall consecrated to the greatest idea of the century, I could perform no task more welcome than that to which I have been assigned,—the task of paying a tribute based on history. I shall use the word Jew, not in the religious, but in the ethnic sense. In so doing, the antithesis to "Jew" is not Christian, but non-Jew, or Gentile.

The position of the Jews in the world is peculiar. They may be Englishmen, Germans, Americans, and as such, loyal to the land of their birth. They may or may not continue to adhere to a certain phase of religion. But they cannot avoid being known as the scattered fragments of a nation. Most of them are as distinctly marked by mental traits and by physiognomy as is an Englishman, a German, or a Chinaman.

The Jew, as thus described, is in our midst an American, and has all reasons to be glad which belong to the community at large; but his unique position today, and his importance in history, justify the inquiry whether he may not have special reasons for rejoicing in this auspicious year.

I. Such ground for rejoicing is seen in the fact that the discovery and settlement of America was the work of faith. Columbus believed in the existence and attainableness of that which neither he nor his fellows had ever seen. Apart from his own character and his aims in the voyage of discovery, it was this belief that saved him from discouragement and held his barque true to its westward course. What though he found something greater than he sought? It was his belief in the smaller that made the greater discovery possible.

What is true of the discovery is true of the settlement of America. This, too, was an act of faith. The colonists of Chesapeake and of Massachusetts Bays left the comforts of the old world, braved the dangers of sea, and cold, and savage populations, because they believed in something which could be felt, though not seen, the guidance of a hand which directs the destiny of individuals and of empires.

Now the Jews, as a people, stand in a pre-eminent degree for faith. They must be judged, not by those of their number who, in our day, give themselves over to a life of materialism, but by their best representatives, and by the general current of their history. At the fountain of their being they place a man whose name is the synonym of faith. Abraham, the first Jew, nurtured in the comforts and refinements of a civilization whose grandeur is just beginning to find due appreciation, hears an inward compelling voice, bidding him forsake the land of his fathers, and go forth, he knows not whither, to lay in the distant West the foundations of the empire of faith. The hopes of the entire subsequent world encamped in the tent of the wanderer

from Ur of Chaldea. The migration was a splendid adventure, prophetic of the great development of which it was the beginning.

What was it but the audacity of faith which, in later times, enabled an Isaiah to defy the most powerful army in the world, and Jeremiah to be firm in his convictions in the midst of a city full of enemies? What but faith could have held together the exiles in Babylon, and could have inspired them once more to exchange this home of ease and luxury for the hardships and uncertainties of their devastated Palestinian hills? It was faith that nerved the arm of the Maccabees for their heroic struggle, and the sublimity of faith when the dauntless daughter of Zion defied the power of Rome. The brute force of Rome won the day, but the Jews, dispersed throughout the world, have still been true to the foundation principle of their history. They believe that God has spoken to their fathers, and that he has not forsaken the children, and through that belief they endure.

II. A second ground for Jewish rejoicing today is that America, in its development, is realizing Jewish dreams. A bolder dreamer than the Hebrew prophet the world has not known. He revelled in glowing pictures of home and prosperity and brotherhood in the good times that were yet to be. The strength of his wing as poet is seen in his ability to take these flights at times when all outward appearances were a denial of his hopes. It was not the prosperous state whose continuance he foresaw, but the decaying state, destined to be shattered, then purified, then rebuilt, then to continue forever. It was not external power, but external power in alliance with inward goodness, whose description called forth his highest genius. His dream, it is true, had its temporal and its local coloring. His coming state, built on righteousness, was to be a kingdom, because this was the form of government with which he was familiar. The seat of this empire was to be Jerusalem, and his patriot heart could have made no other choice. We are now learning to distinguish the essential ideas of a writer from the phraseology in which they find expression. A Jewish empire does not exist, and Jerusalem is not the mistress of the world. And yet the dream of the prophet is true. A home for the oppressed has been found, a home where prosperity and brotherhood dwell together. Substitute America for Jerusalem and a republic for a kingdom and the correctness of the prophet's dream is realized. Let us examine the details of the picture.

1. The prophet foresees a home. In this he is true to one of the marked traits of his people. Who has sung more sweetly than the Hebrew poet of home, where every man shall "sit under his vine and fig tree, and none shall make him afraid;" where the father of a large family is like the hunter whose quiver is full of arrows; where the children are likened to olive plants around the father's table; and where a cardinal virtue of childhood is honor to father and mother? And where shall one look today for finer types of domestic felicity than may be found in Jewish homes? Or, taking the word "home" in its larger sense, where shall one surpass the splendid patriotism of the Hebrew exile:

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning.
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.
If I remember thee not;
If I prefer not Jerusalem
Above my chief joy."

Yet, notwithstanding this love of local habitation, the Jew has been for many cruel centuries a wanderer on the face of the earth. The nations have raged, the kings of the earth have set themselves and have taken counsel together, and the standing miracle of history is that the Jew has not been ground to powder as between the upper and the nether millstone. But these hardships are now, let us hope, near their end. This young republic has welcomed the Jew who has fled from the oppression of the old world. Its constitution declares the equality of men, and experience demonstrates our power to assimilate all comers who desire to be one with us. Here thought and its expression are free. Here is the restful haven which realizes the prophet's dream. Not the Jew only, but all the oppressed of earth, may here find welcome and home. The inspiring example of Columbia's portals always open to the world is destined to alleviate the ills and check the crimes of man against man throughout all lands. And what though here and there a hard and unphilanthropic soul would bolt Columbia's door and recall her invitation or check her free intercourse with nations! This is but the eddy in her course, and to heed these harsh advisers she must be as false to her own past as to her splendid ideal. Chinese exclusion acts and some of the current doctrines of protection are as un-American as they are inhuman.

2. But the Jewish dream was no less of prosperity than of home. America realizes this feature of the dream to an extent never seen before. Where should one seek for a parallel to her inexhaustible resources, and to her phenomenal material development? No element of the community has understood better than the Jewish to reap the harvest which has ever tempted the sickles of industry. Jewish names are numerous and potent in all the exchanges and in all great commercial enterprises. The spirit that schooled itself by hard contact with Judean hills, that has been held in check by adversity for twenty-five centuries, shows in this free land the elasticity of the uncaged eagle. Not only trade, but all other avenues of advance are here open to men of endowments, of whatsoever race and clime. In journalism, in education, in philanthropy, the Jews will average as well as the Gentiles, perhaps better, while many individual Jews have risen to an enviable eminence.

3. A third feature in the Jewish dream, an era of brotherhood and good feeling, is attaining here a beautiful realization.

(1) Nowhere have we finer illustration of this than in the attitude toward the Jews of the great seats of learning. The oldest and largest American university employs its instructors without applying any test of race or religion. In its faculty Jews are always found. To its liberal feast of learning there is a constant and increasing resort of ambitious Jewish youth. Harvard is, of course, not peculiar in this regard. There are other seats of learning where wisdom invites as warmly to her banquet halls. The spectacle at Harvard is, however, specially gratifying, because it seems to be prophetically embodied in her seal, "*Christo et Ecclesiae*," an acknowledgement of her obligations to the Jew and the dedication of her powers to a Jewish carpenter and to a Jewish institution.

(2) The era of brotherhood is also seen in the co-operation of Jew and Gentile to further good causes. To refer again, by permission, to Harvard University, one of the unique and most significant collections is a Semitic museum, fostered by many friends, but chiefly by a Jew. And it is a pleasure to add here that one of the great departments of the library of the University of Chicago has been adopted by the Jews. Although taxed to the utmost to care for their destitute brethren, who seek our shores to escape old world persecution, the Jews are still ever ready to join others in good works for the relief of human need. If

Baron Hirsch's colossal benefactions distributed in America are restricted to Jews, it is because this philanthropist sees in these unfortunate refugees the most needy subjects of benefaction.

(3) But most significant of all is the fact that we are beginning to understand one another in a religious sense. When Jewish rabbis are invited to deliver religious lectures at great universities, and when Jewish congregations welcome Columbian addresses from Christian ministers, we seem to have taken a long step toward acquaintance with one another. The discussion now going on among Jews regarding the adoption of Sunday as the day of public worship, and the Jewish recognition of the greatness of Jesus, which finds expression in synogue addresses — such things are prophecies, whose significance the thoughtful hearer will not fail to perceive.

Now what is the result of this closer union, of which I have instanced a few examples in learning, in philanthropy, and in affairs religious? Is it not the removal of mutual misunderstandings? So long as Judaism and American Christianity stand aloof, each will continue to ascribe to the other the vices of its most unworthy representatives. But when they meet and learn to know one another, they find a great common standing-ground. Judging each by its best, each can have for the other only respect and good will.

The one great exception to the tenor of these remarks, is in matters social. There does not exist that free intercourse between Jews and non-Jews which one might reasonably expect. One of the causes is religious prejudice on both sides, but the chief cause is the evil already mentioned, of estimating Jews and non-Jews by the least worthy members of the two classes. The Jew who is forced to surrender all his goods and flee from Russian oppression, or who purchases the right to remain in the Czar's empire by a sacrifice of his faith, can hardly be blamed if he sees only the bad in those who call themselves Christians. If one of these refugees prospers in America, and carries himself in a lordly manner, and makes himself distasteful even to the cultivated among his co-religionists, can it be wondered at that others transfer his bad manners to all Jews? But let Jew and non-Jew come to understand one another, and the refinement in the one will receive its full recognition from the refinement in the other. Acquaintance and a good heart are the checks against the unthinking condemnation by classes.

III. A third and main reason why the Jew should rejoice in this Columbian year is that American society is, in an important sense, produced and held together by Jewish thought. The justification of this assertion forces on us the question, "What has the Jew done for civilization?"

1. First of all, he has given us the Bible, the scriptures, old and new. It matters not for this discussion that the Jews, as a religious sect, have never given to the books of the New Testament the dignity of canonicity. It suffices that these books, with one or possibly two exceptions, were written by men of Jewish birth.

(1) And where shall one go if not to the Bible to find the noblest literature of the soul? Where shall one find so well expressed as in the Psalms the longing for God and the deep satisfaction of his presence? Where is burning indignation against wrong-doing more strongly portrayed than in the Prophets? Where such a picture as the Gospel gives of love that consumes itself in sacrifice? The highest hopes and moods of the soul reached such attainment among the Jews 2,000 years ago that the intervening ages have not yet shown one step in advance.

(2) Viewed as a hand-book of ethics, the Bible has a power second only to its exalted position as a classic of the soul. The "Ten Words," though negatively expressed, are, in their second half, an admirable statement of the fundamental relations of man to man. Paul's eulogy of love is an unmatched masterpiece of the foundation principle of right living. The adoption of the Golden Rule by all men would banish crime and convert earth into a paradise.

(3) The characters depicted in the Bible are in their way no less effective than the teachings regarding ethics and religion. Indeed, that which is so admirable in these characters is the rare combination of ethics and religion which finds in them expression. In Abraham we see hospitality and faith attaining to adequate expression. Grant, if one will, the claim that part of the picture is unhistorical. Aye, let him have it who will that such a person as Abraham never existed at all. The character, as a creation, does as much honor to the Jew who conceived it as the man, if real, does to the race to which he belonged. Moses is the pattern of the unselfish, state-building patriot, who despised hardships because "he endured as seeing him who is invisible." Jeremiah will forever be inspiration to reformers whose lot is cast in

degenerate days. Paul is the synonym of self-denying zeal, which can be content with nothing less than a gigantic effort to carry good news to the entire world.

And Jesus was a Jew. How often is this fact forgotten, so completely is he identified with the history of the world at large! We say to ourselves that such a commanding personality is too universal for national limitations. We overlook perchance the Judean birth and the Galilean training. Far be it from me to attempt an estimate of the significance of the character and work of Jesus for human progress. Nothing short of omniscience could perform such a task. My purpose is attained by reminding myself and others anew of the nationality of him whom an important part of the world has agreed to consider the greatest and best of human kind. I do not forget that the Jews have not yet in large numbers admitted the greatness of Jesus, but this failure may be largely explained as the effect of certain theological teachings concerning his person, and of the sufferings which Jews have endured at the hands of those who bear his name. But in that name and that personality rightly conceived, there is such potency to bless and to elevate, that I can see no reason why Jesus should not become to the Jews the greatest and most beloved of all their illustrious teachers.

Viewing the Bible as a whole, as a library of ethics, of religion, of ethical-religious character, its influence on language, on devotion, on growth in a hundred directions, exceeds all human computation.

2. Along with the sacred writings have come to the race through the Jew certain great doctrines.

(1) Foremost of these is the belief in one God. Greek philosophy, it is true, was also able to formulate a doctrine of monotheism, but the monotheism which has perpetuated itself is that announced by Hebrew seer and not by Greek philosopher. Something was wanting to make the doctrine more than a cold formula, and that something the Jew supplied. It is the phase of monotheism which he attained that has commended itself to the peoples of Europe and America, to the teeming millions of Islam, and whose adoption by the remaining nations of earth is more than a pious hope.

(2) This God, who is one, is not a blind force, working on lines but half defined, coming to consciousness only as he attains to expression in his universe, but he is a wise architect, whose devising all

things are. "The heavens declare his glory and the firmament showeth his handiwork."

(3) His government is well ordered and right. Chance and fate have here no place. No sparrow falls without him. The very hairs of your head are numbered. Righteousness is the habitation of his throne. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

(4) This one God, maker and governor of all things, is more; he is our Father. Man is created in his image, man's nostrils set vibrating with the divine breath. The prayer of all prayers begins: "Our Father." What infinite dignity and value does this doctrine place upon the human soul! From God we come, and his perpetual care we are. How this conviction lifts men above all pettiness and discouragement! Am I his, co-worker with him on lines which he has preordained? Then mine the joyful task to work with zeal in the good cause whose sure success is seen by him, though not by me.

(5) If God be our father, then we are brothers. The convenient distinctions among men, the division of men into classes, are all superficial—all based on externals. In essence men are one. If we be all brothers, then brotherly duties rest upon us all. Due recognition of our brotherhood would stay the act or thought of wrong and open in every heart a fountain of love. Brothers? Then will I seek the Father's features in every face and try to arouse in every soul the consciousness of its lofty kinship.

(6) The immortality of the soul, though not distinctively a Jewish belief, is implied in much of the Old Testament, is clearly announced in Daniel, is well defined in the centuries preceding our era, and in the New Testament is often stated and everywhere assumed. The doctrine was rescued by the monotheism of the Jew from the grotesque features and ceremonies which characterized it among the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the Greeks. The spiritual genius of the Jew, while asserting unequivocally the fact and emphasizing its moral significance, has wisely abstained from an expression of opinion regarding a thousand details.

(7) By the side of these great doctrines concerning God, his fatherhood, man's brotherhood, the soul, its dignity and immortality, we must place yet another, the Jewish conception of the golden age. This age to him is not past, but future. He had, it is true, his picture of Eden, that garden of God, where the first man held free con-

verse with his Maker. But this picture is not of Jewish origin. It came from Babylon and never succeeded in making a strong impression on the national thought. The Old Testament makes but little of it outside of the narrative in Genesis. In view of the emphasis given to the story by later theologies, the reserve in the New Testament is likewise most significant. The reason is clear. The age of gold is yet to be. Prophet and apostle and apocalyptic seer vie with one another in describing the glory of renewed humanity in the coming kingdom of God. The Jew cannot fasten his thought on a shattered fortune. The brilliant castle which he is yet to build is too entrancing to his vision. There is here no place for tears over the remote past, but only a fond looking forward and working toward the dawn of the day of righteousness and of peace.

3. I have spoken of our indebtedness to the Jew for the Bible and its great doctrines. We are under no less obligations for certain great institutions.

(1) Whence comes our day of rest, one in seven, this beneficent provision for recreation of man and beast, this day consecrated by the experience of centuries to good deeds and holy thoughts? We meet with indications of a seven-day division of time in an Assyrian calendar tablet, but we are able to assert definitely by a study of the Assyrian and Babylonian commercial records that these peoples had nothing which corresponded to the Jewish Sabbath, the very name of which means rest. The origin of the Sabbath may well have to do with the moon's phases. But the Jew viewed the day with such sacredness that he makes its institution coeval with the work of creation. From him it has become the possession of the western world, and its significance for our well-being, physical, moral, and spiritual, is vaster than can be computed.

(2) I have spoken already of Jesus as a Jew. Then is the religion which bears his name a Jewish institution. It has elements which are not Jewish, it has passed into the keeping of those who are not Jews. But its earliest advocates and disciples no less than its founder were Jews. Not only so, but these all considered Jesus, his teaching and the teaching concerning him as the culmination of the Hebrew development, the fulfilment of the Hebrew prophet's hope. The greatest expounder of Christianity writes to the Romans that they have been grafted into the olive stock of which the Jews were branches by

nature. Many causes have wrought together to insure the victory which Christianity has won in the world. But those who are filled with its true spirit and who are thoughtful can never forget its Judean origin.

(3) To the same source we must likewise trace institutional Christianity, the church. The first church was at Jerusalem. The first churches were among devout Jews dispersed in the great Gentile centers of population. The ordinances of the church have an intimate connection with Jewish religious usages. In the course of a long development other elements have crept in. But in her main features the church bears ever the stamp of her origin. The service is Jewish. We still read from the Jewish psalter, we still sing the themes of psalmist and apostle, the aim of the sermon is still to arouse the listener to the adoption of Jewish ideas, we pray in phraseology taken from Jewish scriptures. Our Sunday-schools have for their prime object acquaintance with Jewish writings. Our missions are designed to tell men of God's love as revealed to them through a Jew. Our church and Christian charities are but the embodiment of the Golden Rule as uttered by a Jew.

4. It may furthermore be fairly said that the Jew, through these writings, doctrines, and institutions, has bequeathed to the world the highest ideals of life. On the binding and title page of its books the Jewish Publication Society of America has pictured the lion and the lamb lying down together and the child playing with the asp, while underneath the picture is written the words, "Israel's mission is peace." The picture tells what Israel's prophet saw more than twenty-five centuries ago. The subscription tells less than the truth. Israel's mission is peace, morality, and religion, or, better still, Israel's mission is peace through morality and religion. This the nation's lesson to the world. This the spirit of the greatest characters in Israel's history. To live in the same spirit, in a word, to become like the foremost of all Israelites — this is the highest that any man yet venture to hope.

I have catalogued with some detail, though by no means with fullness, Jewish elements in our civilization. In most cases I have passed no judgment on these elements. If one were disposed to inquire into their value he might answer his question by trying to conceive what we should be without the Bible, its characters, doctrines, ethics, institu-

tions, hopes and ideals. To think these elements absent from our civilization is impossible, because they have largely made us what we are. Not more closely interlocked are the warp and woof of a fabric than are these elements with all that is best and highest in our life and thought. If the culture of our day is a fairer product than that of any preceding age we cannot fail to see how far we are indebted for this to the Jew.

My purpose has not been to inquire by what means the little nation of Palestine attained to its unique eminence. Some will say it was by revelation made to them alone, others that they were fortunate discoverers, and yet others would explain it all by the spell, "development." Be one or all of these answers true, the Deity can reveal himself only to the choice souls who have understanding for the higher thought; discovery is made only by those who recognize a new truth when it floats into the field of vision; development is only growth and differentiation from germs already existing. Why should Israel develop unlike other peoples; why discover truth hidden from others; why become receptacles for revelation higher than any attained elsewhere? This is one of the mysteries of history, but the mystery can in no wise obscure the fact.

However explained, or unexplained, the Jewish rôle in history belongs to the most splendid achievements of the human race. Alas, that these achievements are so often forgotten! Forgotten by the Jew himself when he devotes his powers to the problems of today with such intensity as to be indifferent to his nation's past. Forgotten by those among whom he lives when they view him as an alien, and when in the enjoyment they fail to recognize the source of some of their greatest blessings. It is not alone the land which was discovered by Columbus, but the entire world owes to the Jew a debt of gratitude which never can be paid.

A practical closing question forces itself on our attention. The great rôle in history was played by this people while it had a national or semi-national existence. At present the Jews are separated from the rest of the community mainly by certain religious observances. Is the Jew of today worthy of the glorious past of his people, and is he entitled to any of the consideration which impartial history must accord to his ancestors? An affirmative answer, if it can be given, ought to do something to remove prejudices which yet linger among

us and to alleviate the fortunes of the Jew in lands less liberal than our own.

The ancient Jew was a man of persistence and of moral and spiritual genius. His modern brother is not lacking in either genius or persistence. His persistence and power to recuperate have saved him from annihilation. His genius shows itself chiefly in matters of finance, in the ability to turn the most adverse conditions into power. In literature, art, music, philosophy, he is of the community at large, averaging high, no doubt, but with nothing distinctive. In the world's markets, in commerce and trade, he distances competitors.

The extent to which he educates his children and helps his poor to become self-supporting, and the very small percentage which he furnishes to the annals of crime, give to him a high character for morality. The Montefiores, Hirsches, Emma Lazaruses, Jacob Schiffs, and Felix Adlers show what power and spirit of benevolence and reform still belong to the Jew.

It would, perhaps, be too much to demand further great religious contributions from this people. But the genius which showed itself of old in the realm of religion, and which is today no less evident in the realm of practical affairs, may be again expected to turn itself more and more to the noblest living and to the amelioration of the lot of men. Nothing will be so helpful in bringing about this end as for the Jew himself to magnify the work of his fathers, and for the rest of the community cordially to recognize what he has done and what he still has the power to do. It can hardly be that a people of such glory in the past and of such present power shall fail to attain again to that eminence in the highest things for which they seem to be marked out by their unique history.

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